K.J.YESUDAS

– *The bearded Yesudas singing with Hemlata*

THE LEGEND, ON RECORD!

To millions of South Indians, the name inspires instant veneration. Add a few million more other Indians and global music lovers for whom Yesudas again needs no introduction.

One of the living legends in music, Dr Kattisery Joseph Yesudas' fame transcends all manmade and musical boundaries. Film songs, multi-religious devotional numbers, folk and, of course, classical songs form a part of his prolific repertoire of an estimated 30,000-plus songs in a career spanning 40 years. Hindi film music buffs first experienced the exquisite calibre of his voice in the 1976 hit **Chhoti Si Baat** duet '**Jaaneman jaaneman tere do nayan**', though his first recordings were for the five songs for **Anand Mahal**, which was released later.

Yesudas had his best Hindi innings under the Rajshri banner (**Chitchor**, **Dulhan Wohi Jo Piya Man Bhaaye**, **Sunayana**, **Maan Abhimaan** and **Saawan Ko Aane Do**) most of which were for Ravindra Jain. Among his other hit songs were '**Madhuban khushboo detaa hai**' (**Saajan Bina Suhaagan**), '**Dil ke tukde tukde**' (**Dada**), both under Usha Khanna, '**Kaa karoon sajni**' (**Swami**) and '**Dekh lo ishq ka martaba**' (**Charandass**) under Rajesh Roshan, '**Mohabbat bade kaam ki cheez**' (**Trishul**/Khaiyyaam) and '**Maana ho tum**' (**Toote Khilone**/Bappi Lahiri). Among his weightier numbers were the classical songs of Jaidev's **Alaap**, Ravindra Jain's **Tansen** (which never saw the light of day) and Laxmikant Pyarelal's '**Zamaane se kuchh log darte nahin**' (**Zara Si Zindagi**). In Hindi films Yesudas was last heard in **Daayra**, **Hindustani** and **Daud** in the mid-'90s. But then Yesudas, who for the last few years has grown very choosy, prefers to do music that he believes in and which he feels reflects our culture. "As it is," quips the legend, "I have always believed in the maxim '**Gaane gaane pe likha hai gaanewale ka naam!**'" 2001 saw a resurgence of Yesudas on the national scene with his splendid (but poorly-marketed) album

Sitaron Mein Tu Hi and in the international arena with his first English-cum-world music album **Ahimsa**. In India on a hectic concert tour (the family spends considerable time in the USA for family and business reasons) the legendary singer took time off for a relaxed chat on matters musical.

On how Ahimsa happened: A friend had organised a concert in Los Angeles. Ricardo Barrantes, who conceived and composed **Ahimsa**, was in the audience and approached me later, asking, "Will you sing for me?". I told him guardedly that we could meet and discuss the matter because I wasn't interested in any pop album. He called me up a couple of months later and I realized he had been listening to a lot of my recordings and was planning something different. The first song that he sang to me was 'Circle of return', a very difficult composition with it's half-beats, twists, and turns. That's when I realised the depth of his talent. After that it took us three-and-a-half years to complete the album, because his forte is depth and passion in whatever he takes up."

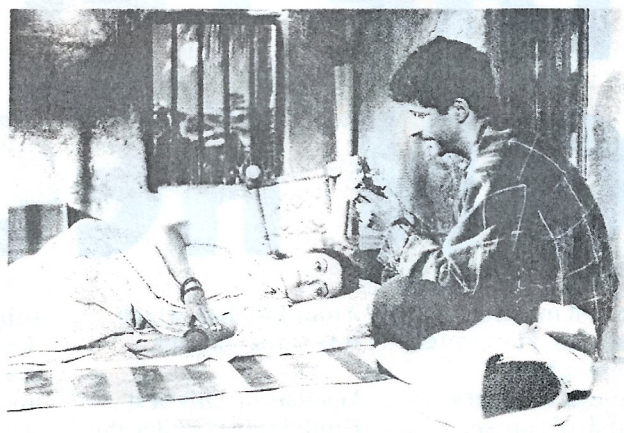
On the title song : We performed '**Ahimsa**', the title track, on November 14, 1999 at the Millennium Concert organized by the World Peace Organization in Paris. It was the perfect time and place, as Mahatma Gandhi's concept is something the world respects and needs today. The organizers had a great concept, they brought artistes from hostile countries to work together. The Pakistani band, Junoon, played while I sang."

On singing in English: What I enjoyed most was the freedom I was given. I don't know how successful I've been, singing in English, but the basic core of **Ahimsa** is forgiveness and sacrifice. It transcends languages and cultures. English is an international language that brings together people from different cultures.

On his personal feelings on non-violence and peace: Nowadays there's too much **himsa** (violence). All religions preach love, sacrifice and peace but today, sadly, religion creates hatred because it's used as a weapon.

On singing devotional songs of various religions: All religions believe that God created us. But who created God? No one can answer this question. So, essentially, religion is a matter of faith and belief. Through my experiences I have surrendered completely to that Supreme Power. For 40 years I have been performing. If I begin to think that I alone am doing it, I will be finished. There is some Power, which is driving me. When I begin my concerts, I offer my prayer to the Almighty — this is something that I picked up from the Muslims who remember Allah before doing anything. There is no harm in taking anything good from any religion. I'm often asked how I feel singing Hindu bhajans. I tell them that I believe in letters, not words.

– *Chitchor*



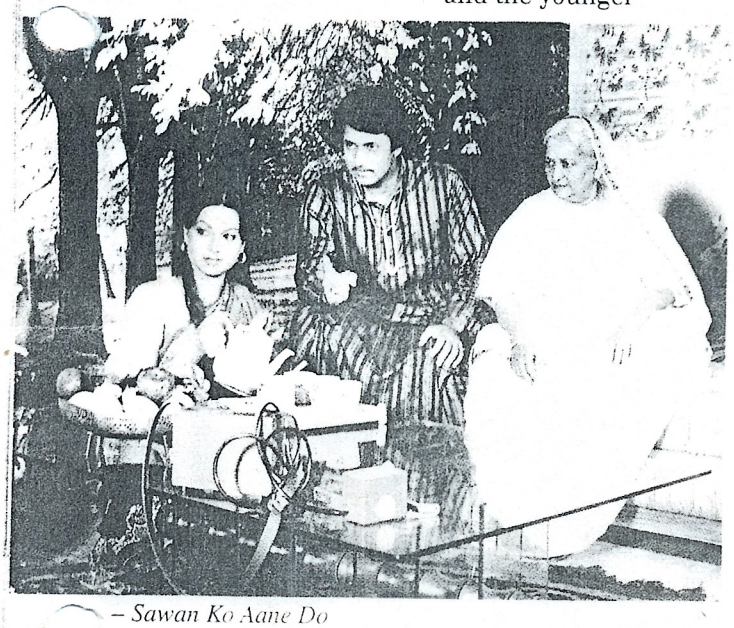
– *Sunayana*

On once being ex-communicated by the Church in Kerala for singing bhajans and performing in temples: There was a small problem, but they later understood that I was not converting to another religion. They understood that the ultimate God does not have any religion! In fact, when I entered the film industry I was advised to change my name, as it was fashionable to adopt Hindu names, the way Dilip Kumar or Madhubala did. But my father told me that there was no point in changing one's name merely to get something. He said, "If you do not achieve anything, you can leave the industry." Again, I was very keen that my children should not be baptized. I was not against it, but thought that the right approach was to let them choose their own faith after growing up, after learning that they've to be a good human being first."

On any opposition he faced on singing in temples: I have sung at the Ayyappa temple in Kerala. They have a **dargah** and a church in their complex — their philosophy is very deep and I have sung there often but I was not allowed entry into the Guruvayur temple and other private temples in Kerala. In Tamilnadu things are more liberal.

On making the masses go in for quality music: The media can do a lot to support good music. Music companies and TV channels want fast songs and do not promote the many good songs that are still being made. When I sing, I would like people to concentrate on the music, the words and my singing. I do not want dancing around on my stage. Art is most important! We cannot fight trends but genuine lovers of good music can and must come together to start a TV channel that will play only standard music. And by that I mean songs that have lyrical value, strong melody and mirror our culture.

Where do you hear the sitar, sarangi or tabla today? Pure thoughts and philosophies are most important. Even the younger generation will be gradually influenced by good music. If you serve them only pizza and never idli, how will they know that they have a choice? The other day I was performing only devotional songs in my concert here in Mumbai and the younger generation enjoyed them. As for me, I have no material desires left to fulfil. I'd rather relax than sing songs that I do not enjoy. Again today there is this regrettable trend of suppressing the singer's voice, which delivers the poetry, and enhancing only the orchestration and effects. We are very particular about not doing this when we record any artiste in my studios. The vocal level should be kept up in the final mixing. Nowadays they do the opposite -- maybe they are covering up the deficiencies in the lyrics, tune and vocals!"



– *Sawan Ko Aane Do*

Fact File

Born: January 10, 1940 at Fort Cochi, Kerala.

Parents': Augustine Joseph Bhagavator and Mrs Elizabeth Allikutty.

Musical background: Yesudas learnt Carnatic classical music from the age of 5 and gave his first stage performance at the age of 12. He also learnt under other teachers and acquired Sangeetabhushanam and Gaanabhushanam but was rejected by All India Radio and for a film.

First recording: The song **'Jyathibhetham mathadheshwam'** for the Malayalam film Kalpadukal on 14th November 1961.

Idols: Mohammed Rafi, Lata Mangeshkar, Chembai Vaydhyanatha Bhagavathor and Balamuralikrishna.

Languages sung in: All Indian languages except Kashmiri and Assamese.

On why he sang for a few Hindi films: "Luckily or unluckily I was busy in the South and was even setting up my studio in Trivandrum in the period from **Chhoti Si Baat** to the mid-'80s. On the other hand there were some composers who had reservations about me or were even uncooperative but I did manage a fair amount of songs for almost all the composers from Naushad to Anand Milind and for actors from Amitabh Bachchan to Govinda and Sanjay Dutt.

On a childhood full of struggle: When my father, who was a musician, singer and stage artiste, fell onto bad days, it was tough even to manage Rs 5 for my tuition fees! Most of his so-called friends left him, though some proved to be true loyalists. I learnt a lot of lessons about life through this experience.

On how Indian music can be popularized abroad: Melody appeals to everyone, and our music is very strong in melody. The problem lies in our many languages. This is why musicians who have made the maximum impact abroad like Zubin Mehta and Pt. Ravi Shanker have been instrumentalists, as this leaves only one language which the entire world understands — the language of music."

— DR. RAJIV VIJAYAKAR